

CONVERSATIONS GUIDE

BY KIM ENGELMANN



MORE THAN JUST "STUFF": WHY CREATION MEANS TRANSFORMATION FOR OUR BODIES, OUR SELVES

BY STEVE WILKENS

In this article Wilkens describes for us the body/soul dualism that has its roots in a Platonic understanding of human nature. Wilkens argues that the integration of body and soul is critical to the Christian understanding



of salvation and resurrection, whereas a dualistic model is not. The physical has been created for a purpose. Creation is not an

accident. We are more than "just stuff." Indeed nature ought to be referred to in the classic sense not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what it should be-namely recognizing its purpose. In other words, nature is a teleological concept. God as Creator had a purpose in creating a physical universe, and its inhabitants; this is a purpose that includes the material substance of things. As Christians, we ought not talk of breaking free from a corpse in the afterlife. As Wilkens states "there is no need of a resurrection (anastasis which literally means 'to stand up again") if someone... is not dead. Second, Paul specifically includes the idea that it is a body (soma) that is resurrected." In Scripture the *soma* that is resurrected has every appearance of a whole person, spiritual and physical coming back to life. We are more than the body; more

than just a collection of physiological interactions. We demonstrate aesthetic sensibility, moral judgment, reason, volition etc. Yet these qualities are embedded within meat, bones and glands. Our corporeality is not accidental to personhood. Who we are and how the physicality and spirituality of our own natures are intertwined pushes us into the realm of mystery as it should since we are created in God's image. God elevates the physical into the realm of the spiritual. Thus, the bread and the cup in Communion become the very means of grace; the very body and blood of Jesus Christ is our salvation.

- Have you been aware of language in Christian circles that has seemed dualistic—separated soul and body? Share with the group.
- 2. Do you think, as does Wilkens, that the body—the material self—is as sacred and purpose-filled as what we may call the "spiritual self"? Do you think this question is dualistic? Why or why not?
- 3. Wilkens used the example of Communion which is an excellent way to describe the mystery of the connection between the material and the spiritual. What other examples from Scripture or in your own life make this connection apparent?

A SACRED, GRIEVOUS MOMENT: HOW OUR RELUC-TANCE TO FAST REVEALS A WHOLE BODY DISCONNECT

BY SCOT MCKNIGHT

McKnight talks about fasting as "body talk" and discusses the duality between body and spirit. Many think of the body as the not so good part and the soul as the good part. This is erroneous. The body is extremely important in Scripture, as McKnight

points out, and also the body and the soul/spirit are embodied as a unity. Fasting is about the body and happens when we have grasped the importance of the body for our spirituality. The A→B→C pattern that McKnight holds out for fasting is as follows: sacred moment, response in



fasting, and results. We do not fast because we want something from God—a certain set of results. C never is the

motivation for B. Rather the impetus to fast comes from a sacred moment, where we have empathy for God. Just as we do not "feel" like eating when we are grieving, so if we empathize with God grieving, our fast will come out of recognizing that sacred moment. Fasting is about pathos, taking on God's emotions in a given event. Someone sins egregiously-God is grieved; so are we and we do not eat. Or when someone dies, the same pattern prevails. If people tell us they are fasting our question should be "In response to what?" Not the more common response which is often "What are you fasting for?" Finally McKnight tells of different kinds of fasting. Normal fast or "water fast" is the fasting done when only water is consumed. Abstinence is partial food consumption, whereas absolute fasting is no water or food. Fasting is one way to express embodied spirituality, and our bodies are an important part of our spiritual expression.

- 1. Have you ever fasted? If yes, what was your experience like?
- 2. What are some sacred moments that might move you to fast?
- 3. Do you agree with McKnight's assertion that the true fast is a response to a sacred moment—not to get something from God? Why or why not?
- 4. How do you understand fasting as body talk?

LOVE YOUR HANDS: CARE FOR THE BODY AS SACRED TASK

BY MARILYN MCENTYRE

Marilyn McIntyre talks about the importance of caring for the physical body and the spiritual truths that our physical being declares. She begins with a quote from *Beloved* where Baby Suggs, "an unchurched preacher" encourages the abused and despised former slaves to love themselves,



get in touch with who they are, by getting in touch with their bodies. "Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them." She continues

on with this litany of body parts, all deserving of love. The gift of the body is something to rejoice in. McEntyre goes on to illustrate how important the care of the physical body is in other contexts as well. To touch a homeless persons hand, or hold a wheezing baby born into poverty, etc. are all ways we can undo depriving the "unclean" of physical contact. Those who have undergone torture must also recognize that the violation of their body is an assault on souls and begin the work of healing through touch, food and safe shelter. Care for the body is a sacred task. Physical healing can have a profound transformation in attitude and sense of self-worth. Even patients who have impaired bodies can retrain them and renew their lives in profound ways that compensate and reframe their condition. Those who are dying are touched bodily by hospital staff and hospice workers in ways that validate their body and communicate tenderness. Then there is the wonder of our bodies and the intricacies of each of the body parts that illustrate different theological concepts. As Christ's hands and feet, the very body of Christ, our physical being can be a testimony to the reality that we were fashioned and made in love; because of this, we ought to take care of our bodies and stand in awe of the gift that our body is-a gift of infinite majesty.

- 1. Have you ever thought about the intricacies of your body, and how the different parts, functioning together, testify to a Creator? Are you aware of your body as you pray? How is awareness of our physical body helpful as we commune with God?
- 2. What theological truths can you think of that are illustrated by the functioning of the body?

PEDALING IN GOD'S PRESENCE: DISCIPLINE FOR BODY AND SOUL

BY NATHAN FOSTER

Nathan Foster brings together his love for biking with the spiritual disciplines. He finds that meditation, worship, prayer, study and solitude can be practiced doing the biking he loves. He states, "I think the fact that I enjoy exercise so much threw me off. I was under the impression that spiritual disciplines were supposed to have at least some element of drudgery.... However, I wonder if fun and sheer enjoyment in active doing might also hold a flavor of the holy?" The spiritual practices developed for Nathan during an injury where he was unable to exercise. As he lay on his back in pain he began to practice these disciplines. They began to fill the mental void that the injury had left, and mirrored a lot of his experience on the bike. In prayer and meditation Nathan's thoughts moved from his injury, pain, and discontent to God. He was reminded of God's ability to bring good out of bad. He became calm and as he puts it "my edges were softened." This experience then caused him to reflect on his exercise through the lenses of spiritual formation. As he pedals he meditated to "reset" his head. As he observes nature,



he worships as he admires the Creator. Worship often turns to prayer as he paints a prayer portrait. Attaching scriptures to his bike, he studies.

Solitude is most natural on the bike as he can ride in silence and rest. God delights in joining Nathan on the bike.

- 1. What do you love to do? Can you think of a way that you can incorporate the spiritual disciplines into this enjoyable activity? Is it already happening? In what way? Share together.
- 2. Do you think that fun and sheer enjoyment holds a flavor of the holy? Why or why not?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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